

Fight without the gun

Russian artists fight against unfreedom and censorship

Host: WU, Dar-Kuen

Guest: Vladimir Nadein

Wu(00:18): Ok?

VN(00:19): Yeah yeah, of course, always.

Wu(00:20):

Hi, all the guest. Welcome to MoCA on Air, and today is a very special day, we invite Vlamin from Russia to come over to this podcast program. Because maybe everybody knows now the situation about the Russia and Ukraine. Vlamin, could you tell us why bring you come over to Taiwan, and what's the reason and situation over there? Maybe you can give us some brief introduction, and later on we can continue.

VN (00:56):

First of all, thank you so much for inviting for MoCA on Air for this discussion and the podcast.

Hello, everyone. My name is Vladinir Nadein. I am formerly based in Moscow, film maker, curator and producer.

And what brought me to Taiwan? The war is going on already for more than eight months since 24th February.

And one week after the war started, I had to leave the country for different reasons, but maybe the main one was the impossibility to live there anymore. Because, when your country is committing genocide, and starting tragic war with neighboring country, but you don't understand how you can actually stop that. You feel ashamed and very guilty. So that is kind of pushing me out from living there very fast. But it was kind of a long journey to come to Taiwan.

Wu(01:58):

So as we all know you and Dina your partner, because of the Putin government they raise the war to Ukraine, and that's why make you leave the country first.

VN (02:10): Yes!

Wu (02:12):

So, just mention that's a very long journey, and what would be the choice of you? We know you did some like protest when you are in Russia, and that's why make you couldn't stay there. Could you tell us the process, and also after you leaving Russia, why you come over to here?

VN (02:38):

We join actually the protest on the very first day on the 24th in the evening there was a protest on the square, one of the biggest squares in Moscow.

But it was a quite small protest I would say comparing to the population of Moscow. And actually that frustrated me a lot. Because I could see how many people actually very passive and didn't reacted immediately, i mean there are still quite a lot of people, but at the same moment you are really frustrated about this kind of politicalness or these passiveness, people just keep steering on their smartphones and that nothing is really happening.

And of course but when you join the protest the police brutality is really violent.

And even to protest like the only can save you from to be arrested, even not caring any sign you know, you just has to be in the protest.

But once you raise a sign or you scream something, you will be immediately arrested. And that, of course, kind of pushes you out.

And I was like observing how the situation is escalating and how people actually as well like remain passive from day to day and like in the process already kind of being suppressed.

So yeah that's kind of I understood after talking with a lot of my friends who kind of having these mood swings of leaving or not, we have to stay because we have to fight, we have to help, we have to like protest.

But at the same moment, you kind of see that you don't know how you can really change that and the government also became very brutal.

So, all these kind of complexes you can sense push you away. You don't want to associate yourself with the country anymore.

Wu (04:36):

So, do you have any choice at that time? You need to decide you leave your country, or if you stay over there, and what would happened to you?

VN (04:46):

If I would stay, I guess I would probably not stayed silent, or just push my own protest as far as I could, and probably will end up in obviously some prison or whatever, because that's the only thing you can do being there I think.

But how you protect yourself, you know, we are animals, so we have this kind of feeling of saving our lives in a way that work.

Wu (05:20):

So no matter why like now you are here in Taiwan, or in the future maybe you will travel to other country. Do you have kind of considering stander or maybe related to like the freedom of creation or atmosphere of the political sense in that place, or the local art environment? Is anything related to why you choose to come over to here?

VN (05:49): To Taiwan?

Wu (05:50): Yeah.

VN (05:52):

Yeah, like. First of all like when you escaped from the country. Then you think, okay, what's next?

You don't really have plan you know, everything is very in emergency; yeah the situation was really like unclear. But, your colleague and VT member Su Hui-Yu, who and i know for like already more than 5 years, we brought him to Moscow for the festival. So we were a kind of colleagues and friends I would say.

He was the person who learned that we are away from Russia and proposed to come to Taiwan for the residency. Yeah I never been to Taiwan before but I knew a lot of films and works of different artists. So I really admire what people

are doing here. So yeah, that was like a great like life-changing I would say, or like a proposal to come here.

Wu (06:51):

So because of Hui-Yu and he raise you an invitation, kind of. So now you are here.

VN (06:59):

Yes. Now I am here and I'm actually very grateful for being here. I can say I'm in love with Taiwan. It's a wonderful place to be, and people and the culture. And also how people embrace democracy and the freedom of speech and everything for me is like completely different world that I never live in. Of course I have been to different country, but it's very different permanent to the place where you know censor for example.

Wu (07:40):

So could you tell us the contemporary art or the video documentary or film festival in your country? And maybe you can also talk with us about that, before Ukraine war, what is the situation in Moscow and after the war how it changed it?

VN (08:00):

It changed dramatically. In the past years making and organizing film festival for example, in general film festivals, it's very much dependent on state funded or state oriented. This is different world. So for us we were making experimental film festival that has nothing to do with state, money or whatever, so we had like relative freedom of doing things or showing film that we really want. But it was always our own risk, but we never tried to sell censorship ourselves, and even you feel that it might have accrued, you tried to discuss it, saying okay I'm afraid of like showing this film or.... You always raise this kind of flag or you try to be self-aware of these things. But once you are involved in private institutions, they always try to check whatever you are planning to show but more flexible. But in the past two years the ministry of culture try to kind of surveillance, try to understand what the Festival are showing, so you have to apply film program in advance like one month before the festival starts, with all the descriptions of films. So we actually had to erase, cleaning the descriptions of the films, something that can trigger their interest.

Wu (09:43):

So they will censor you when you propose to them?

VN (09:50):

Yes, sure, because they give the permission to make a festival whatever it is independent or not.

Wu (09:58):

Ok. But do they sponsor your festival or?

VN (10:03):

No no no. It's just like what's general law for all the festivals happening in Russia and...

Wu (10:10):

So do you think is a very broad boundary which is invisible? We couldn't really cross the boundary?

VN (10:23):

The system is really unclear, and the censorship, it's like there are no certain rules about it. I mean there are certain rules because you understand if you really tell them you're showing queer films or tackling LGBTQ+ rights, they will refuse you or censor you. But you still can show this film without giving them a sense you were showing. But as I say it's mostly regarding independence of festivals. I think state festivals would never risk or something like that.

Wu (10:55):

As we know, in Mainland China in past time when they showed this kind of avant-garde films or like you mentioned LGBTQ+, actually suddenly the police will come and close the whole festival. But somehow they will go to some faraway place and nobody really know them, then they just screen them. And after that they just disappear. They do this kind of pop-up event since long time ago. But actually quite efficient those documentary film artists. Is it also similar in Russia in your country?

VN (11:48): you mean this like of pop-up?

Wu (11:50): Yeah.

VN (11:53):

Mm... not really, I would say. In terms of film scene, not really. Maybe a little bit with like electronic music scene it could be, because they were like more in danger for the past years, but I think it's mostly about self-censorship. Because the government tries to post legislations that make people afraid of doing certain things. But for example, answering your question about how it actually changed after the war, I can only now like relate from what I read from very very few friends who remain there because most of my community, closed people with whom I worked, they all left the country. So nobody is there anymore. But....none of the festivals actually admire...they didn't happen.

Wu (12:44):

So, could you tell us the majority how many curators or artists decided to leave the country? Do you know the numbers?

VN (12:58):

Mm...no. I mean there is no even clearer statistics how many people left the country in general but I would say my estimation would like after one million. I think.

Wu (13:09):

But you know somebody said the bad time might be also a good chance. So do you think it's a good timing for doing the curating thing or art environment join this kind of protest outside? Leave your country and you can bring them message outside.

VN (13:33):

Yes, I think outside it's very important, like to raise this question and like supporting also Ukraine and to fight Russian imperialism with your projects outside. Inside of the country, I think the only thing possible is the protest. It can be different types of protests. There's a great organization, it's actually a network. It's called Feminist Anti-war Resistance. So they are protesting actually in various cities across the world and but in Moscow. They are kind of anonymous group of people like feminists, do like different activisms, and sometimes it touches in a way arts. It's actually activism inside of the city, installing different crosses with numbers like how many people died in there in the war in Ukraine. So you can call it already kind of art. But just in general, showing films or organizing exhibitions I think it's impossible. The only gesture I really like in the exhibition few months ago. One artist just put like left blank space in the gallery and put a sign "I cannot present my work because of the thing I cannot even tell why is it not even showing".

Wu (15:07):

I think it's also similar like the Russia Pavilion you design to leave the whole Pavilion empty, right?

VN (15:14): Yeah

Wu (15:15): It's also kind of the protest way? It was one year ago.

VN (15:18):

Yeah, of course, this year wouldn't possible to do anything there for sure. And it did not really happen as well. Artists refused their participation on the second day after the war started. Yeah, but last year yes we did like cage which I think was resemblance of political situation. But the surface was like the empty space and but underground level was kind of dark, like the electric music video games that are presenting the situation.

Wu (15:53):

So, could you also mention about what your exhibition right now at the VT Art Salon. Talk about the exhibition and the concept to our audience.

VN (16:06):

The exhibition Deep Play done with Dina, it's our long-term project that we have been doing more than two years. And it based on the official modification of the famous game GTA(Grand Theft Auto). But it's a modification made by fan developers and it's called GTA criminal Russia. It's a multiplayer game, that is, the whole environment changed from the United States to generalize Russian cities with some real iconic or famous places, like red square Kremlin or different buildings and architectures. But the most interesting and important thing to us, how the game is structured is the role-play game where you have to play for like prison guards, military, police, and the players have to involve themselves emotionally, and I would even say physically involved in the game. So it's not just like I'm playing for the policeman, that kind of have a distance for that, but I have to play as if to become real.

So after observing how actually players are playing and how they spend their time, we thought we could see that actually the extending of the reality, Russian reality, and how the military man, the war and imperialism is really cultivating there and how wars are centralizing in this space. So we thought it might be actually very

interesting entrance point to talk about the situation and environment and war itself, but through like a kind of uncritical space of the video game, because they exist as if it would be like... their take is uncritical. Game is... there is nothing like criticizing the state or whatever. For us, it's kind of a chance or detour to talk about it.

Wu (18:06):

Yeah, and also I remember when we visited the exhibition, actually it's like a very strong impact actually. We can sense like from the virtual reality and on internet actually. There is only kind of the oasis we habit, like a freedom space zone we can do for the people in Russia. So how you can justify for the reality and our virtual life and this kind of connections?

VN (18:48):

If I understanding correctly, for me, the virtual is not separated from real. Even like we could see like that, for example, real propaganda is really merging into the virtual world. For example, one work there is a concert that related to victory day, the celebration of the Second World War, or how actual Russian called it Great Patriotic War. So you can see that the real propaganda merge there. People celebrate the holiday with military parade as they do in the reality. So you cannot distinguish, okay, this is the reality and this is like virtual. Actually, we are real people that spending our lives and time online you know. So, it is just like continuation of the physical space to me. I could see that clearness from working and observing how actually people inhabit these days.

Wu (19:48):

Ok. So the question is about art and society. Talk about the Russia movies and actually from the Eisenstein. Talk about these kind of historic impacts, and how do you think film and documentary and all these kind of forms of art creations' relations to the societies. And mention about the film history. Actually it quite strongly connected to that time the Russia society and also influenced to the whole the European film history. And from your previous projects, or maybe Dina also this time she had screening her work the daily news at the film center. Could you mention about how you use the archive in the way you create for your creations?

VN (21:07):

Yeah, for Dina's work and for the work Deep Play with VT, their archival material plays a big role. We work a lot with fun footage. Dina has more of the practice of the footage film making. This fun footages they can sometimes tell us more than, at

least my imagination works, in that sense. When I discover images, for example, even like for the video game Deep Play exhibition, not everything presented there, it has not been shot by us, none of the materials. It's all found on Youtube, which is like, we are not there, we didn't shoot it, so it's like it's a personal perspective of the players, not thinking that they are recording themselves for the film. They just record it for the sake of the audience on Youtube. So, we can observe and find a lot of things that you are not able to record in the game. Never. We can record the space, but like unique interactions they are really unique, shoot them by themselves. So for me it represents the history a lot, and for the future I think it can be a great study of also virtual world. But I am talking about other film represented that I produced Detours that will be shown in TFAI. It talks about a drug dealer, so call treasure men. It is a specific job I would say, that related to the system that kick off almost like ten years ago in Russia that how actually drugs are distributed. Because they are not distributed as like it has been before. You have dealer and call; he carries the drugs to you. Everything is done on dark square and online, so nobody actually sees anyone. The treasure men and treasure women they're hiding drugs status around the city, and then the customers receive the locations to pick up the drugs, hidden places but inside of the city. The film represents also a specific time of Russia. I would say it's like a tour of how the thing is distributed. It's also related toward the resistance toward the government and the state.

Wu (23:50):

In my perspective actually you are using the images as archive, and actually each material you just mentioned you are not filming by yourself. How you select it? You see as an event happens, for example, like concert event happens and suddenly you decided that, oh, this can be a good material for your storyline, and you can pick it up and add it into the storyline. So during that time how do you treat yourself as a creator of creation, or kind of like an editor?

VN (24:41):

First of all, you are watching like hours and hours of that material and there is so many of course boring stuff going on obviously. Sometimes it's unbearable to watch. You just watch someone drive in the city like two hours. But you wait for that specific small phrase or line that might change the whole perspective of the person driving away for one hour. So, you have to be very patient, and sometimes it's even toxic sometime to watch that for so long and consumption is really terrible. But of course, when you discover this like concert you cannot believe your eyes like, it's really happening, and you feel it's a precious moment.

So, mostly you wait for these things that correspond with reality, and when you understand this is similar to what I experience in my life, or like now they are really behave like a real policeman, or now they have the situation like Putin coming to military base to inspect the soldiers and then suddenly one soldier among twenty is asked to sing the national anthem, for example. Of course this moment can tell us something about reality.

Wu (26:14):

I think I can understand what you mean. I know so very agree with you. You need to be very very patient to watch the all those materials and just pick like some specific moments when the aura comes. It's like inefficient somehow right?

VN (26:33):

Absolutely, and talking about like archive, for example, I am super impatient to, for example, to put a camera and to wait for that. But watch something already existing, you kind of feel, "ok...It will come." But when like shooting yourself, you feel "ok...I will not arrange that...nothing will happen".

Wu (26:54):

So could you tell us about how do you think about the free will is very important for any humankind or as an art creator?

VN (27:07): Free will?

Wu (27:08): Yeah. Free will

VN (27:10):

Actually I think about a lot of free will. Also I think, of course I'm affected by the place where I live. Even like preparing the exhibition, I always like catching myself, like "okay I'm kind of restricting myself." I'm not used to be like to free to... even like Exhibition we made in VT wouldn't be possible in Russia. We were preparing like a bigger film and that we still will to make. But we understood we will probably never show it there in the future. So I'm actually learning now I would say how to use this free will and really like free yourself, because now you just can't tell or can say things you can. But before it was like...it was a resistant. okay I will tell the truth. I try to not to censor myself. So it's a very different mode and I am still learning.

Wu (28:13):

Could you tell us, what would be your next step for your activities or your creations or you have any next project?

VN (28:25):

We are about to start a new project. Still we are in making the film. My parents used to live in a closed city in Russia. The closed city is like really gated city that you can't enter without specific permission or like really leaving there. So it cross Russia there is kind of network of this closed city, and they're always related to atomic production. So my parents ended up there until they're high-school-age but then they left because it was impossible to live there. So I'm starting a research about this like closed cities and atomic reproduction, because it highly relevant now I think. I want to try to connect from my personal family story because I was used to go there when I was a kid. Yeah but still we have to see the ways we can realize it and maybe we remain in Taiwan which we will to do now. So maybe it will be a chance to do here or whatever.

And because talking about freedom or artistic will, the main question is how you keep talking about things that concern you. And now it's of course the country you lived in the society and the political situation, but how you can actually talk about it being outside? How not to lose the connection? How to be objective? But still like you cannot shoot for example. You can't just come and put the camera. So what kind of creative process you care when you have wars around that distance.

Wu (30:03):

Okay, my last question if the war is finished, and you can go back to your country. What will be the things you want to do the most?

VN (30:14):

I think first of all I guess probably when the war finish, the country will start to disassembled. I think it will fall apart. It's like you can see the lost from the region where other minorities or indigenous people are leaving. They want their independence. They don't want to be part of this anymore you. So I think the country will start to fall apart. And maybe that'll be a very long process. But what I would love to do, even to go to Moscow, I will start from the most Asian part. I will just maybe go to Asian part, and see what is going there, and I don't want to go Moscow. I have seen there.

Wu (31:04): So you can travel by the Siberian railway.

VN (31:07): Yeah from other city.

Wu (31:11): Yeah, from other side from Vladivostok go back to Saint-Petersburg.

VN (31:17): But I also would love to investigate and research that part of country.

Wu (31:26):

Great. Thank you so much. Today is very nice we can have you and join this MoCA podcast. And for our audience, we hope to see you on rest of your other activities, and also hear about your news more and please contact us.

VN (31:49): Thank you so much. Thank you so much for listening

Wu (31:53): Thanks for the audience to the MoCA podcast. Okay. 謝謝. Bye-bye